

Biography and Training of Afa Yusif Ajura

As told by Baba Issahaku Yuysif to Alhassan Saeed Dawuni and Fuseini Abdul-Fatawu

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Text transcribed and translated by John Alhaasan Issah

Question: M bori ni m bohi a mi Afa Ajura ni daa piligi o yilla sheli ka wula ka di daa kana.

Translation: Tell us how come Afa Ajura composed and sang songs

Response: Be dɔɣila Afa Ajura Ejura amaa o ya n daa nye Savelugu. Naawuni daa nammi o la lahzibu daadam. O ma daa malila o pua yuma ata. Di saha ka be chani ti diri Ejura daa ka be ti yeli ni zaŋmi o ma maa mpahi chaŋ ni di pa sheli be ni nya tima. Be daa tehiya ni doro mbala dama pua maa daa yaɣi saha sheli o ni daa simdi ni o dɔɣi. Nimaani ka dɔɣim maa kpurigi o ka o dɔɣi Afa Ajura nimaani. Be daa dɔɣi o mi ni nyina. Be ni dɔɣi o lala ka be yeli ni din ŋunɣuna ti ni pɔbi o mi ŋmaɣni pɔi dama o pɔri shem maa zugu ka ti naan yi zaŋ o kuna Savelugu ti niŋ o suuna Yusif. Ka sokam daa dii booni o Ajuradoo. Amaa pa Ajura nira n-daa nye o. O ni yiɣisina nyen piligi o karim, o piligila Kumbungu. Pa Afa yino sani ka o daa karinda. O ni daa be Kumbungu be daa ŋmeri wa'sheli ka be booni li Ayaamajilo-Tamaale waa n-nye li. Nimaani ka o gbaagi yila maa. Nimaani ka o yi n-chaŋ Sabali. O daa karim Kajebi nti yi nimaani labna n-chaŋ Karachi Imam Imoro sani nti bohim litaafi beni ka ti booni *Zuhri*. Lala Imam maa n-daa sabi lala litaafi maa. Nimaani ka o dii nye o yilla baŋsim. O ni daa kuna ka nya ka Dagbamba zaŋsim be yila puuni pam di ni nye o yi pili waazu yihibu o zaŋdila yila maa kpehiri di puuni. O yi yiini yila maa di kperi niriba gari o yaagi o noli yeri yeltɔɣa. O ni daa piligi o yila maa shem mbala. Ti Daalifa kpamba ni yeli ti shem ka ti wum mbala.

Translation: Afa Ajura was born at Ejura in the Brong Ahafo region, but his hometown was Savelugu. He was born as a mysterious child. His mother was pregnant for 3 years. At that time there were some traders from the North here who used to travel down (Ejura) to the South of Ghana to trade in kola nuts. People thought the mother's situation was sickness because she over due to deliver. So, the traders decided to travel with her seek a treatment. It was at Ejura that labour started and she delivered him there with teeth at birth. His weight at birth was so small, and so they covered him up in some cloth and put him in a calabash. Upon their return, he was named Yusif, but many decided to nickname him Ejura-man (*Ajuradoo*). When he grew up, he started taking instruction in Arabic and Islam at Kumbungu. He actually learned from many Imams. Whilst at Kumbungu, there was this local music and dance known as *Ayaamajilo*. Afa Ajura got interested in it and learned the lyrics of the music. From Kumbungu he

went to Sabali to continue to learn there, and then to Kajebi, and then to Karachi. At Karachi, he studied under Imam Imoro. At Karachi Afa Ajura studied one *litaafi* (book) known as *Zuhri* which was written by Imam Imoro himself. From there Afa Ajura developed his music skills. When he returned to Dagban and realizing Dagombas have an interest in music, he decided to infuse music into his preaching. Preaching with music was more meaningful to the people than mere talking. This is how it all began. This what our renowned Imams have narrated it to us.

Question: Ya polo ka o daa lee yiini yilla maa?

Translation: In which places did he sing these songs?

Response: O waazu yihibu saha ka o daa zaŋdi li pahira. Luxilikam ka o daa yi mali waazu, o ni zaŋ o yila maa mpahi/n-niŋ dini. O daa yiini li mi ndolila halli shega din ti be zieemani maa puuni ka bi viela. Dinima ka o yen yili yeli ba ka be baŋ ni di bi viela.

[Any where he was to go and preach he will preach with his music.] O daa niŋdila o waazu maa ka di nyela goli puuni o ni tooi niŋ buta. Bus stop, Agric Bank nyaangi maa bee fonna ni- kuyili. Ka lala kuyili ka be mali waazu nimaani. O ni daa tooi niŋdi o waazunima maa luxishega mbala. O daa tooi lahi chani tiŋkpaŋinsi nti yihiri waazunima maa. O daa chani Walewale, Gambaga. Lala ni ka Afa Seidu ba daa ti zaŋ o ti o ka o zaŋ o kuli maa na.

Translation: He only sang the songs at places he was to preach. Wherever he was to preach to he will infuse his music. His preaching was situational and for the type audience he had, dealing especially with things he considered wayward in the eyes of Allah. He would tell them to repent from those evil deeds.

He used to preach at least 3 times in a month. Places like the bus station in Tamale, around Agricultural Development bank, and at funerals where there was preaching. He also used to go to villages to preach. He traveled to places like Walewale and Gambaga to preach. It was during such travels that Imam Seidu's father gave him to Afa Ajura tso he could teach him. Afa Ajura was born in 1909 and he passed on 22 December, 2004.

Question: Yila maa zahimbu maa (*Alwuldi-walikaafia*) lee buxisila wula?

Translation: How is the music measured in stanzas?

Response: *Alwuldi-Walkaafia* malila di dahalali baŋsim. Ka di mali di dahalali book. Nira yi chaŋ University be ni wuhi a li 1st year. Di ti ma soli ka n yi nye yilikam n ni tooi yili.

Translation: *Alwuldi-Walkaafia* is a course itself and has its own materials/book. First year students study it as a course. It has developed my skills to the level that I can sing any song.

Question: Ni a lihi Afa Ajura yilla balibubalibu, di zaa kumsi [melody] maa be di konkoba, ya polo ka di yina? Di lee nyela Qu'ranic maa ni ka yina bee Adiini maani?

Translation: If you look at the melodies in Afa Ajura's music, there are all different. How come? Is it the Qu'ran or the religion?

Response: Din ka n di pun yeli o ni poi ka Musulinsi na bi niŋ, Sukulikasi dabsili daa beni Laribaawa tiŋa ka be laɣiŋdi na nimaani nti nyuri dam nyiini yila nyandi taba. Dinzuɣu be yila maa puuni Laribanchi bachi maɲa bele di puuni din yen che ka ti tooi baŋdi Al-Qu'uran maa vieɲyela dama karim zilinli mbala. Lala ni yeli shem maa wuhimi ni Laribanchi be ni soŋdi be yilla shem mbala maa. Al-Qu'ran din dini bela di konko. O yila maa gbunni nyela Qu'rani mini Hadith. [He then mentions the names of some books with those melodies.]

Translation: As I mentioned earlier, before Islam there was this Sukulikasi day among the Arabs where they would gather to drink and have a music competition. As a result, there were words in Arabic in it which facilitated an understanding of the Quran. What I mean is that the way is written is the pattern of the Arabs. Qu'ranic cantillation patterns are different. His songs have a bearing in the teaching of Qu'ran and Hadith. The content is from the Qu'ran and Hadith, but the melodies are from Arabic culture.